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SUMPs for BSR

Using digital tools to support public space transformation in Gdynia

SUMPs for BSR - Enhancing Effective Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning for Supporting Active Mobility in BSR Cities

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Imprint

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Project note

SUMPs for BSR project supports cities shifting their planning practices towards people-centred sustainable urban mobility planning, focusing on active mobility modes to fight the climate crisis. The project aims to increase the uptake of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) as a strategic tool for sustainable mobility planning by developing tools and offering extensive capacity building for local authorities, especially in small and mid-sized BSR cities. A common framework on monitoring and evaluation for sustainable urban mobility planning will be developed to set up sound local processes suitable for smaller cities. Together with a unified model for testing and experimenting with innovative mobility solutions, it will help to evaluate the performance of the local mobility system and to provide crucial information for planning and decision-making.

1.1. Using digital tools to support public space transformation in Gdynia

City profile

Gdynia is a coastal city in northern Poland and part of the Tricity metropolitan area together with Gdańsk and Sopot. With around 245,000 inhabitants, the city plays an important role as a **transport hub, port city and centre for innovation and education**. Over recent years, Gdynia has strengthened its commitment to sustainable urban development, placing **increasing emphasis on active mobility, high-quality public spaces and citizen involvement in planning processes**.

The city has adopted a SUMP that highlights the importance of integrating mobility planning with public space design. Within this framework, Gdynia has been **exploring new tools to better communicate planning ideas and to involve residents in shaping urban environments**. The small-scale experiment at Constitution Square formed part of this broader effort, focusing on how digital tools can support planning and dialogue around public space transformation.

Objectives of the pilot

The small-scale experiment aimed to **test whether digital visualisation and communication tools could improve understanding, acceptance and discussion of planned changes to a central public space**. Constitution Square, located in a key area of the city, had been identified as a place with high traffic pressure and limited comfort for pedestrians, despite its strategic importance and potential for transformation.

The specific objectives of the pilot were to:

- Support the planning process for Constitution Square by visualising possible spatial and mobility-related changes.
- Improve communication between the city administration and residents by presenting planning ideas in an accessible and engaging way.
- Test ICT-based tools, such as a virtual tour and video material, as alternatives or complements to traditional consultation formats.
- Collect feedback from residents and stakeholders to inform further planning steps.
- Assess the usefulness of digital tools for future public space and mobility projects in Gdynia.

The materials reflected an early-stage concept intended to support understanding and dialogue, rather than a final design proposal.

Pilot activities

The experiment focused on developing and testing digital materials that illustrated potential changes to Constitution Square. The activities were implemented in a short time frame and designed to be flexible and low-cost, while still providing meaningful insights for planners and decision-makers.

Development of the virtual tour

A central element of the pilot was the creation of a virtual tour of Constitution Square. Using panoramic images and digital visualisation techniques, the tour presented the existing situation alongside proposed changes to the layout of the square. These included adjustments to traffic organisation, pedestrian areas and the overall use of public space.

The virtual tour allowed users to navigate the square digitally, view different perspectives and better understand how proposed interventions could affect movement, safety and comfort. This approach aimed to overcome common communication barriers, where technical drawings or written descriptions may be difficult for non-experts to interpret.

Preparation of video materials

In addition to the virtual tour, the city prepared a short explanatory video presenting the background, objectives and key ideas of the planned transformation (Figure 1). The video combined visualisations, narration and on-site footage to explain why changes to Constitution Square were being considered and how they could improve conditions for pedestrians and other users.

The video was designed for online dissemination and social media use, making it easy to reach a wide audience. It also served as a stand-alone communication tool that could be shared independently of meetings or workshops.

Figure 1. Still frame from the explanatory video presenting the early-stage concept for Constitution Square. Source: City of Gdynia.

Publication and outreach (online and on-site)

Both the virtual tour and the video were published through the City of Gdynia's communication channels, including the municipal website and social media platforms. Online dissemination allowed residents to access the materials independently and at their own pace.

Importantly, the digital tools were also used during on-site consultation activities. The materials were presented and discussed at consultation points organised at Gdynia Main Railway Station (Figure 2) and at Constitution Square. These locations were selected due to their high pedestrian flows and accessibility.

Using the video and visual materials in face-to-face conversations helped facilitate discussion, clarify misunderstandings and collect spontaneous feedback from residents who might not normally participate in formal consultations. The materials were promoted to encourage residents to explore the proposed changes and share their opinions.

Figure 2. Consultation point at Gdynia Main Railway Station, where digital materials related to Constitution Square were presented and discussed with residents. Photo: City of Gdynia

Feedback collection

Feedback was collected through multiple channels. Residents shared their views online via comments and messages related to the published materials. In parallel, feedback was gathered during on-site consultation points, where city representatives presented the video and visualisations and engaged directly with passers-by.

This combination of digital and face-to-face interaction allowed for spontaneous and qualitative input. Comments were documented by the city's planning team and later analysed to identify recurring themes related to safety, accessibility, traffic organisation and public space quality.

While the pilot did not include a formal survey or workshop series within the project framework, the diversity of channels enabled the city to collect meaningful insights to support further planning discussions.

Stakeholders and interaction activities

The pilot involved several municipal departments, including units responsible for sustainable mobility, urban planning and communication. These departments worked together to develop the digital content, ensure consistency with planning objectives and coordinate outreach activities.

The main external stakeholder group consisted of residents and users of Constitution Square, who were invited to explore the digital materials and provide feedback. Local stakeholders familiar with the area, such as nearby residents and regular passers-by, were particularly important, as their daily experience informed many of the comments received. For precise means of stakeholder interaction, see above the “Feedback collection” and “Publication and outreach” subchapters.

In addition, selected materials were presented during public events, including activities linked to European Mobility Week (Figure 6) and Car-Free Day. These events provided an opportunity to reach a broad and diverse audience in an informal setting. The digital tools supported direct conversations with residents and helped initiate discussions about the future of Constitution Square. Feedback gathered during these events complemented the online input and enriched the overall understanding of public perceptions.

Figure 3. Presentation of digital materials during European Mobility Week activities in Gdynia. Photo: City of Gdynia

Evaluation and monitoring activities

Evaluation of the pilot focused on understanding how effectively the digital tools supported communication, engagement and internal learning, rather than measuring physical changes or behavioural outcomes.

Monitoring digital engagement

The city monitored online engagement metrics, such as views, reactions and comments related to the virtual tour and video materials (incl. YouTube Analytics). These indicators helped assess the reach of the pilot and identify which types of content attracted the most attention.

Engagement data were reviewed internally to understand how residents interacted with the materials and whether the digital format encouraged exploration of planning ideas.

These indicators were used as supportive metrics to understand reach and interest, rather than as measures of decision-making or acceptance.

Analysis of qualitative feedback

Qualitative feedback provided through comments and messages was collected and analysed by the planning team. This feedback was reviewed to identify recurring themes, concerns and suggestions related to safety, accessibility, traffic organisation, public space quality and carrying out pilot activities.

The analysis focused on understanding perceptions and expectations rather than quantifying opinions. This approach supported reflective learning and helped planners assess whether pilot activities needed any modifications and whether the proposed changes were communicated clearly and understood as intended.

Internal reflection and triangulation

The evaluation also included internal reflection meetings between involved municipal departments. These discussions compared digital engagement data with qualitative feedback and staff observations.

By triangulating online metrics, user comments and professional judgement, the city assessed the strengths and limitations of the digital tools and discussed how they could be improved or combined with other participation methods in future projects.

Success stories and best practices

+ Digital visualisation helped translate abstract planning concepts into concrete and understandable images.
+ The virtual tour enabled residents to explore the space independently and at their own pace.
+ Online communication channels allowed the city to reach audiences beyond those typically involved in consultations.
+ The pilot required limited financial and organisational resources while delivering clear insights.
+ Cross-departmental cooperation, also between projects, strengthened internal capacity for digital engagement and increased the visibility of projects.

Challenges and deviations

– Digital channels alone are not sufficient to ensure inclusive participation and should be complemented by face-to-face interaction. Feedback remained largely qualitative and could not be easily quantified.

- Some comments reflected misunderstandings, showing the need for clearer explanations or complementary formats.
- The absence of face-to-face discussion reduced opportunities for deeper dialogue.

Results and impact of the pilot

The small-scale experiment demonstrated that **digital tools can play a meaningful role in communicating and discussing public space transformation**. Although the pilot did not aim to make final decisions or implement physical changes, it contributed to the planning process by improving understanding and dialogue. Key results and impacts included:

- Increased visibility of the planned transformation of Constitution Square
- Improved understanding among residents of proposed spatial and mobility-related changes
- Collection of constructive feedback highlighting local needs and concerns
- Enhanced internal awareness of how digital tools can support planning communication

Sustainability and scalability

The pilot showed strong potential for reuse and scaling within Gdynia's planning processes. Digital tools such as virtual tours and videos can be adapted to other locations and projects with relatively low effort once the initial skills and workflows are established.

From a sustainability perspective:

- Digital materials can remain available online as reference tools throughout planning processes.
- The approach reduces the need for repeated in-person meetings.

In terms of scalability:

- Similar tools could be applied to other squares, streets or neighbourhoods.
- Digital engagement could be combined with surveys or workshops for deeper participation.
- The method is transferable to other cities with limited resources.

Although the learning curve is high – initial preparation requires coordination and learning –, the approach is easily replicable once internal workflows and competences are established.

Lessons learned

The experiment provided several important lessons for future planning and engagement activities. It confirmed that digital tools are effective for explaining complex ideas, but also that they work best when combined with clear messaging and complementary participation formats.

Key lessons included:

- Visualisation is critical for communicating spatial change.
- Digital engagement lowers participation barriers but does not replace dialogue entirely.
- Early testing helps identify communication gaps before formal consultations.
- Internal cooperation between planners and communication specialists is essential.

- Simple, well-designed tools can deliver high value with modest resources.

If repeated, the city would consider combining digital tools with targeted workshops or surveys and allocating additional time for responding to public feedback.

For more information about this case study, you are welcome to contact the City of Gdynia: Justyna Suchanek justyna.suchanek[at]gdynia.pl; mobilnosc[at]gdynia.pl**.**